



1862: Battle between U.S.S. *Monitor* and C.S.S. *Virginia*.

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Monitor and Merrimack

The U.S. Civil War battle between two ironclad warships, the U.S.S. *Monitor* and the converted steam frigate *Merrimack*, fought at Hampton Roads, Va., on Mar. 9, 1862, marked the end of the age of sail-driven, wooden-hulled warships. In 1861, as they withdrew from Norfolk at the beginning of the war, the Union forces had scuttled the U.S.S. *Merrimack*. The Confederates raised the abandoned ship, added a ram to its bow, stripped the superstructure of sail and rigging, and placed a protective, sloped iron casemate over the hull and deck. With this ironclad, renamed the C.S.S. *Virginia*, the South intended to break the Union's strangling blockade of the Southern coast by wooden warships. To meet the threat, John ERICSSON designed and built the *Monitor*, an all-iron steam-driven vessel with a single turret housing two guns.

Neither ship proved able to destroy the other, but the tactical stalemate was a strategic victory for the North. By its presence, the *Monitor* prevented the *Virginia* from dispersing the Union blockaders. (Unable to retreat up the James River from Norfolk, the *Virginia* was destroyed by the Confederates on May 10, 1862.) The Union built many *Monitor*-type vessels, but the Confederacy lacked the industrial capacity necessary for large-scale construction of blockade-breaking ironclads. On Dec. 31, 1862, the unseaworthy *Monitor* foundered off Cape Hatteras, N.C. The ship was rediscovered by underwater archaeologists in 1973, in too fragile a condition to be raised. Its 590 kg (1,300 lb) anchor was recovered in 1983.

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Bibliography: Davis, William C., *Duel Between the First Iron-clads* (1975); Hoehling, Adolph A., *Thunder at Hampton Roads* (1976); Hunter, A.F., *A Year on the Monitor and the Destruction of Fort Sumter*, ed. by C. Symons and W. Stall (1987).